The Losers Club

RT: So, was anyone going to tell me that Eddie was moving to LA or was I supposed to just find out when he called me to tell me he's there?

Cause it would have been real fucking nice to have a heads up so I wasn't out of town. Like, real fucking nice keeping me in the dark here

BD: I thought he'd been talking about moving for a while now?

BM: Richie...

RT: Moving, yeah, once he got everything settled with his fucking mom-wife. Not moving clear across the country to my neck of the woods.

Oh, fuck you with that mom-wife shit. You know what, forget hanging out when you get back. I'll be too busy fucking your mom.

I can manage the risks (for you, with you) by Basilintime

Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti)
Genre: Anxiety, Coming Out, Eddie Lives, F/M, Falling In Love, M/M, Mentions of Emotional Abuse, Night Terrors, PTSD, Pining, Probably sex at some point, Some angst, Two idiots who love each other, a whole lot of cursing, dealing with murderous shapeshifting clowns can fuck you up, definitely a lot of making out, figuring out relationships, its a happy ending after all, the repressed gays finally get their chance
Language: English
Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Myra Kaspbrak, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris
Relationships: Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier
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Summary:

Eddie Kaspbrak lives.

Eddie Kaspbrak lives and is fairly certain that his best friend, Richie Tozier, just confessed he loved him and that he fucked it up in his disbelief.

After everything, Eddie knows he needs to make a change. He just hopes that hinging some of that change on Richie doesn't backfire on him.

1. Removing the Roadblocks

"I love you, Eddie."

There were moments in Eddie Kaspbrak's life that he regretted but none stood out more than this. He regretted it because he'd laughed as Richie had looked at him with an earnest expression. They had been sitting in the hospital room he'd been stuck in for several weeks at that point and he had laughed because he knew it had to be a joke. He had laughed to cover the nervous twist in his gut that had nothing to do with the fact they'd been recently rearranged by a giant demonic clown.

Richie had sat staring at him for a moment and Eddie had felt that uncertainty grow as he let his laughter die. It was the first moment he realized that maybe it hadn't actually been a joke at all. Richie Tozier wasn't usually quiet, not like he was in those long seconds before Eddie could swallow down that emotion and respond.

"Hey, Rich, I love you too. You know that, right?" And Eddie had meant it. He may have forgotten it over the years, just like he'd forgotten most everything about Derry and the Losers Club, but he'd been certain of it from the second he'd seen Richie step back into his life. He was and always had been in love with his best friend. He was as certain about that as he had been certain that Richie could never feel that same way in return. The flicker of disappointment on Richie's face had him doubting that suddenly but the moment was gone and Richie was giving a laugh.

"Shit, don't go getting all sentimental there, Eds." Rich rolled his eyes as he brushed the comment off with a half-assed joke and Eddie was left with an unsettled feeling that he'd just fucked up.

"You started it, asshole." Eddie flipped Richie off which brought another peal of laughter out of him and he made the choice that he was going to change things. And maybe once he had everything in place…well, Eddie needed to change things either way.

So, when he'd been released from the hospital, and all of the Losers went their separate ways, Eddie went his own way as well.

He'd gone back home to Myra who had proceeded to go off on him the second he walked in the door; had done that overbearing balance of concern and control that had become more and more evident over the years. All of it was layered with *sweetness* and *care* to keep it from being the obvious manipulation it was.

He knew now that it had always been there, that mirroring of his mother's control she'd forced on him. Maybe it had been subtler in the beginning, maybe it had been just as glaringly obvious back then but he hadn't seen it. Hadn't been able to see it since his recollections of his own mother's deceptions when he was young had been smudged away from his memories of Derry.

He'd listened to her berate him for putting her through all that worry, all that fear, and all because he had to go see some old friends. And then he had told her he wanted a fucking divorce.

The next several months had been a mess. He had made a lot of concessions to her in an attempt to get it done and over with. He had made a lot of concessions to her because, despite the fact that he had never been in love with her and that part of him greatly despised her, he still cared about her too. Just like he still cared about his mother despite the fact that, were she still alive, he wouldn't speak to her again. It was a bitch of a thing when you still cared about someone like that.

He had stuck with it despite the attempts to reel him back in. Had focused on the fact he was doing this for a reason.

It had taken far longer than Eddie had wanted to tie off those loose ends, to eliminate the risks and roadblocks in his path. Part of him feared that it would have taken too long, that he'd get everything sorted and find it was too late. Sometimes, on those nights it was toughest, he'd call Richie. Just to check in. And Richie always answered, gave him encouragement while making casual insults that weren't really insults at all. Eddie never asked if he'd meant it, what he had said in the hospital, and he never told Richie that part of the reason he was doing this was for him.

Eddie hoped Rich understood even if he wasn't quite able to say it yet.

He watched Richie's comedy specials on TV whenever they were on, saw the show where he'd finally come out in more way than one. Eddie knew it hadn't been planned, that it was just Richie going off the cuff like he was wont to do. Could tell that he was terrified as he stood on stage and admitted that there would be some changes.

"So, I've gotta be real about some things here. I know there's been a lot of rumors flying around in the last few months. And I'm here to tell you they're all fucking true. I am gay. I don't write my own jokes though I'm going to be trying to change that one. The gay thing is staying though. Oh, and I definitely helped trash a Chinese restaurant in my old hometown but in my defense…I was seeing some really fucked up shit that night."

Eddie tried to call Richie that night, to make sure he was okay, but that had been the first time he hadn't gotten an answer. A week later, Eddie's divorce had been finalized and he'd missed Richie finally returning his call.

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"So, this is the place. You're welcome to stay as long as you'd like."

Two weeks later and Eddie was on the other side of the country. He looked around as he stepped in through the front door after Bev; Ben had already run back downstairs to meet with the movers so they knew where to bring everything.

There wasn't a whole lot for them to bring really given the place was already furnished and Eddie had found he had owned very few things that he considered 'his' after the divorce. Most of it had been Myra's and so that had been who it had stayed with.

Eddie felt a bit overwhelmed as he looked around, setting his bags down on the couch. When Ben had said he had a small place in Santa Monica that Eddie was more than welcome to use he hadn't thought he'd meant an entire top floor suite all to himself. Eddie could just imagine what a deathtrap this place could be in the middle of an earthquake.

Eddie was not ready to face his first earthquake and sincerely hoped it'd be a while before that inevitability would happen.

"You guys sure about this? Even with the new job I can't imagine I'd be able to afford the rent in a place like this." Bev gave him a smile, one of those small knowing ones that had honestly scared him a little when he was younger. She'd always been intimidating and Eddie had felt fortunate that she picked them, the Losers.

"We're fine with it, Eddie. We're going to be traveling for a bit and even if we weren't, we'd probably settle at the place up north. No reason for you not to use the space."

She had more of an ease about her now; less of that lingering sadness that had been there when they were kids and still when they'd all returned to Derry. They all had a little less of that or, at least, Eddie hoped they all did. He'd be feeling pretty shit if this whole plan backfired on him. He was very aware of the fact that he'd just left everything behind. He was out to dry with none of his old safety nets and not entirely certain he wasn't going to make a fool of himself.

"Well, I appreciate it. Gotta start fresh somehow, you know?" Part of him was terrified that Richie choosing to come out during his show had been a sign he'd found someone else. That Eddie had taken too long to get Myra to agree to the terms of the divorce or that, even worse, he'd misunderstood the situation entirely and he'd be out here living in an entirely too fancy death trap on top of a building that may very well crumble into the ocean.

Except, well, it was a building Ben had designed and, despite what a mess that clubhouse had been as kids, Eddie knew that he wouldn't have designed a place without all the proper safety measures.

There was perhaps more than a small part of Eddie that was falling back into old panic at the moment. Being here felt different than all the planning had over the last few months. It had taken shape as a familiar fear in his chest, that tightness that had been

excused as asthma instead of the anxiety it really was. He had upheaved his entire life, moved to the other side of the country and was realizing for the first time that he seriously should have talked to Richie about that not-quite a confession at the hospital.

He had wanted to get away though. He had wanted to tie up the loose ends that had haunted him throughout his life. Cut off the repeating cycle of overcontrolling emotional abuse that he knew he was strong enough to reject now. And he wanted something different, something better, even if there was a chance it couldn't be with Richie.

God, he really hoped it would be with Richie. If the asshole had found someone to be with while Eddie was picking his own life apart…

"Hey, Eddie, where do you want the guys to take the boxes for now?" Ben's head popped in through the doorway behind Bev, a smile blossoming on his face when he saw her there. He stole a quick kiss while gently nudging her out of the way of the movers as they followed in behind him.

Ugh, love…lucky assholes.

"You guys can set them over in the corner for now." Eddie watched the movers skeptically, hoped that they hadn't managed to break the last few remaining things he owned. It would be easier if they put them in one spot for now and he could get them organized once he had his bearings a bit better.

Maybe once he'd had a good chance to actually take a deep breath and evaluate.

"So, the fridge should be stocked with the basics to get you started. There's a grocery store just down the street that's usually pretty good and they'll deliver which is always nice if you get busy. And, you know, feel free to change things around if you want. The place is yours so I don't want you to feel like you can't make it feel like home."

Ben shifted through the open floor plan to the kitchen to

pop the fridge door open to grab a bottle of water as the movers filed in with boxes they'd brought up in the elevator.

Fifteen total. Fifteen boxes contained the entirety of Eddie's possessions he had felt like keeping.

He wished just then that one of those things had been the inhaler. It was fucking useless, he knew that, but a security blanket was a security blanket.

"Do you want us to stay and help you get unpacked?" Ben gave him a smile and Eddie knew he was lucky to have friends like them. He was lucky to have them back in his life but right at that moment all he really wanted was to be on his own.

"You know, Eddie's had a long day. Maybe it'd be better that we leave him be to get settled." Bev gave Ben a bit of a pointed look and a small moment of realization flickered across his face.

"Yeah, I appreciate all this but I am pretty wiped with how long of a drive that was to get in. I thought the whole getting across the entire fucking nation was going to be the thing that took the longest. I feel like it took more time to make it across town from the hotel though." Eddie had thought driving in New York was bad until he experienced LA traffic. He was dreading the drive into his new job but it at least wasn't far.

He dreaded starting up a new job. More risk management, maybe not as far from his old life as he'd like.

"Yeah, you're going to be dealing with that quite a bit. I'd suggest getting familiar with the public transport if you want to stay sane." Bev stole the bottle of water away from Ben as he spoke, taking a swig from it as she glanced at the time.

"That's all of them." The main guy with the moving company cut in as he stood just inside the door with a tablet that clearly held the bill. It had taken them all of ten minutes to actually get the boxes upstairs from the storage pod that had been delivered the night before but Eddie was still dreading to see the total. It had cost an arm and a leg just to get those boxes shipped here; he really

should have just insisted on carrying the damned things himself.

"We'll go ahead and get out of your head, Eds." Bev gave Ben a small tug to get him moving towards the door as Eddie pulled his wallet from his pocket.

"Let us know if you want to do breakfast tomorrow before we head out. We should have plenty of time; we're slotted to fly at 2." Ben gave him a hug and Eddie maybe smiled for the first time in a while as he patted his back awkwardly in return. "Get some rest, man."

"Yeah, thanks. I'll let you know about breakfast."

Ben side stepped around the mover with a smile that was half-heartedly returned by the man. Bev paused in front of Eddie, dangling the key to the place in front of him for a moment without relinquishing it.

"Don't wait too long."

"For what?" Eddie frowned as he tried to take the key from her and she lifted it up out of his reach. Eddie gave her an irritated look before trying to snatch it away again only for her to life it up higher. She snuck in close then to press a kiss against his cheek before speaking in his ear.

"To let Richie know you're here." Eddie felt a bit of heat rush up in his cheeks as she pulled away and gave him that knowing smirk once more. She dropped the key into his open hand before waving and walking away to follow Ben out; laughing when he flipped her off.

"How much do I owe you?" Eddie grumbled as the mover guy gave him an impatient look as he held the tablet out. He opened up his wallet to pull his credit card free as he stepped to see what the damage was and felt like he could have about socked the guy when he saw the total. "You guys have been here for fifteen minutes."

"We wrote down the time we got here. It took us twenty minutes to complete the job and anything over fifteen we have to

charge for the whole hour. If you want, I can have the guys come back up and unpack this treasure trove you've got here. That might take them a whole 'nother five minutes."

"Oh, ha ha ha, jack ass. Just run the damn card."

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He hadn't wasted time. Not with unpacking at least. Eddie had worked through even after his ribs had started to complain, something his doctor had said might persist due to the scar tissue.

Imagine that. Something that wasn't just psychosomatic side effects. He felt a little bitter twist at the thought. The reminder that he'd been convinced of something that hadn't been anything more than his mother's (and then Myra's) controlling fear.

Eddie sighed as he stopped folding his clothes and sat on the edge of the overly large bed. Seriously, it was stupid how big of a bed Ben had decided to put into this place and Eddie was going to have to be in it by himself.

He felt the start of a headache as he heard his mother's voice in the back of his head. A voice that he still hadn't been able to entirely shake.

What have you done, Eddie? You're all alone.

Eddie pinched the bridge of his nose as he closed his eyes. Tried to fight back against that doubt in the back of his head.

What was he doing?

He took a deep breath, fighting against that tightness in his chest as he dropped the pair of pants he'd been folding to grasp for his cell phone. It was instinctual on one level, to reach out to Richie when he felt that panic, knew he could help bring him back down to earth without even needing to know something was wrong.

He dialed Richie's number and stared out the window where he could see the lights of Santa Monica Pier with the last hints of the sunset painting the skyline; the Ferris Wheel turning brightly and

reflecting on the darkening water below it. He listened to the phone ring and worried at his bottom lip. Almost forgot in that moment that he was nervous to talk to Richie as he hoped that he'd answer. That they wouldn't keep missing each other.

"Eddie Spaghetti! What the hell are you doing calling me so late? Isn't it like, shit, one AM there?"

He felt the smile tug at his lips as Richie's voice came over the phone. It sounded like he was outside somewhere, maybe at one of his shows or just out on the town.

Maybe he's with someone.

"Yeah, if I was in New York it probably would be. It's only about ten where I'm at right now." Eddie tapped at the glass of the window for a moment, thought better of it and turned to go sit on the edge of that big empty bed with his clothes piled on it.

"Wait, shit, where are you?" Some of that background noise faded as if Rich had stepped away somewhere quieter for him. Some of the street noise and talking softened and his voice came through clearer. "It's ten in LA right now, man, are you on the west coast?"

"Yeah, just got here today. I'm in Santa Monica actually."

"Well, fuck me."

Eddie felt a bit of heat rise up in his cheeks at the comment. He knew Rich hadn't meant anything by it but his mental response had immediately been *yes, please*.

"Look, I'm not in town but I'll be back in a couple of days. How long are you out here?" That was a loaded question but, well, Eddie was here now. If this didn't work maybe he could ask Ben and Bev if they'd let him use one of their *other* fancy as fuck suites. Maybe he could move to fucking Scotland or something. He was sure that Ben had to have a place on the other side of the world somewhere.

"I'll definitely still be here in a couple of days cause that's sort of the thing. I kind of moved out here…" There was a moment of silence on the other end of the line. He felt like he was sitting in that

hospital room again for a moment only he was the one making the declaration. He was certain Richie would know, would understand and that this would be the moment he'd find out he'd been wrong.

"Holy fuck, the fucking divorce finalized, didn't it? Con-fucking-grats, Eds! Okay, look, two days. I get back and I'm gonna cancel anything that's scheduled and we're gonna party. We're going to celebrate this shit."

"You don't have to cancel shit for me, Rich-"

"Shut the fuck up, I'm not cancelling for you, you dick. You're just fortunate that you decided to move near the end of this fucking tour, alright?"

"Oh, yeah, how real fucking lucky I am that I get to spend time with you, asshole." He heard Richie's laugh, felt that happy warmth spread in his chest that he always got at the sound of it.

"Okay, look, I've gotta go but I can't wait to see your cute fucking face, alright? I'll call you when I get back. We've got a lot to catch up on. I, uh…" Eddie could hear someone telling Richie he needed to get a fucking move on in the background over another one of those silences.

"I'll see you then, jackass."

"Later Eddie Spaghetti."

Eddie heard the line go silent and sat for a long time watching that Ferris Wheel glow in the distance.

2. When the routine fails

Summary for the Chapter:

> Eddie find himself trying to adjust to a life that breaks free of his previous routines. He has his goodbye breakfast with Ben and Bev before they head out and finds himself uncertain how to continue forward.

Notes for the Chapter:

> I'm trying something new in making the text messages look like actual text messages for the *aesthetic*. Hopefully they're still clear and readable but let me know if they aren't.

Eddie hadn't slept much the night before. He had finished putting his clothes away, finished unpacking and getting everything settled into place. Well, into a place. Eddie would likely have to take some time to really figure out where everything would actually belong in the end. Once he'd gotten all the boxes emptied, he had tried lying down in that big, equally empty bed on his own and sleep. Instead, he had laid there tossing and turning for several hours before he had caved in to take some melatonin.

It hadn't exactly helped, exceptionally since it was like taking a kids Tylenol in comparison to the Ambien he'd used to rely on. He was fairly certain it was now late enough he could consider it as early instead and Eddie was now confronted with the struggle on how to even start his day.

He'd had a routine once; not a great routine but a routine nonetheless. Wake up, take his morning rotation of pills that Myra always ensured was laid out for him: multivitamin, an arrangement of other vitamins on top of it, ex-lax, Excedrin, cod liver oil and iron. Those had just been to start the day. He had been responsible for getting up, cooking a healthy meal carefully vetted by Myra before he got showered and dressed for work. Work had been the relief though Myra's constant phone calls had frequently made it feel no different

than being at home.

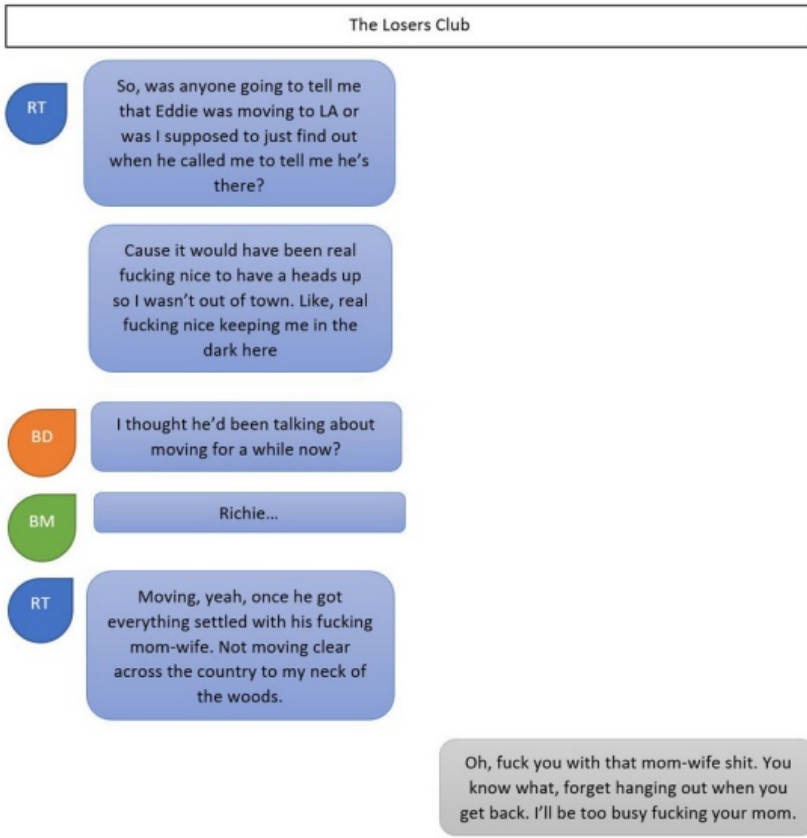
Eddie was free to figure out how he wanted to start his day on his own now. He lay there for a while longer listening to the quiet hum of the air conditioner blowing. It was hard to gauge just what time it was with the black out curtains drawn across the window but there was a hint of soft grey light where he hadn't gotten the seam of the curtains closed entirely.

He felt that sense of disorientation that had hit him so many times since he'd left the hospital. He had no where to go. He could even sleep in if he wanted to without being lectured on how too much sleep could give a higher chance of diabetes, heart disease, stroke and even death.

Getting just the right amount of sleep had done nothing to help Eddie avoid dying a few months ago.

He heard the sound of his phone chime on the bedside table and Eddie sighed as he finally admitted he just needed to get up. If that was Ben and Bev already texting to figure out when to come for breakfast that meant he needed to get moving after all. He sat up and reached for his cell, eyes squinting against the bright light as he woke the screen up and he gave a soft curse as he unlocked it. There were a few messages by the time his eyes had adjusted enough to see properly.

Their collective group text that they'd started after leaving Derry had been active in waves as they all checked in with each other. The first message, this time, was from Richie and Eddie rolled his eyes a bit as he read through them before typing out a quick response.


The Losers Club
RT
So, was anyone going to tell me that Eddie was moving to LA or was I supposed to just find out when he called me to tell me he's there?
Cause it would have been real fucking nice to have a heads up so I wasn't out of town. Like, real fucking nice keeping me in the dark here
BD
I thought he'd been talking about moving for a while now?
BM
Richie...
RT
Moving, yeah, once he got everything settled with his fucking mom-wife. Not moving clear across the country to my neck of the woods.
Oh, fuck you with that mom-wife shit. You know what, forget hanging out when you get back. I'll be too busy fucking your mom.

Eddie watched for a second, had expected Richie to come back with something quick. It showed he was typing for a moment but then that disappeared as well and Eddie worried at a thumb nail.

Keep your hands out of your mouth, Eddie.

He grumbled as he heard that voice in the back of his mind and he tossed his phone aside on the great expanse of the bed. He debated for a moment staying there a bit longer out of pure spite but in the end couldn't bring himself to do so. It would be better if he got up and figured out what he could make for breakfast especially with Ben and Bev coming to join him.

Eddie headed to the bathroom first, turning the water on as hot as he could and opened the small medicine cabinet. He hadn't gotten rid of everything but he had tried to cut it down as much as he was comfortable with. Still with a multivitamin and an allergy pill. He debated for a moment on the laxative for a few seconds as the bathroom mirror steamed up. He finally shoved all the bottles back into the cabinet without taking a single one. Felt sick at the thought of purposefully skipping it all but that voice rising in the back of his mind had renewed that determination to screw his old life.

He stripped out of his pajamas, catching the shape of the scar that started just below his ribs, a slightly jagged line with evenly spaced dots down along the edges where the stitching had been. He stared at it for a moment feeling equal parts proud and disgusted by it and as the mirror fogged up, he got the sense that he wasn't alone. He turned around but found the large, bright bathroom empty still and Eddie swallowed roughly as he finished undressing to get into the shower.

He had a moment of gratitude as he stepped under the stream of water; hot enough it burned a little leaving his skin flushed from the heat. There had been a lot of hotel bathroom over the last few months; bathrooms where the light didn't manage to chase away the shadows in the shower stall. Long curtains that drowned out any real sign of what was on the other side. Bathrooms where Eddie had found himself feeling claustrophobic or paranoid that there was someone or something lingering just out of sight.

In contrast, Ben and Bev's bathroom was large, bright and clean. A light above the shower itself chased the dark spaces away and even without it the glass door that neatly closed allowed the light to pool in. Nothing would be sneaking up on him here. No one was going to drive a knife through his cheek without him seeing it coming.

Eddie stood for a long time under the water, a luxury he hadn't really given himself in those darker spaces. The impulse to scrub it all away; those twenty-seven years where he'd been living a half life without even realizing it, was strong. To exfoliate away all the cells that still clung to him from when his memories had been taken from him and he had forgotten his own strength, the lengths

his mother had gone to make him believe he was sick, the friends who he'd been willing to risk his life for and the one he'd always loved.

It only took twenty-seven days for your skin to completely regenerate but Eddie had twenty-seven years-worth of layers built up.

Eddie took the chance to try and wash all that away in hopes that this attempt at a different sort of life might actually succeed. That when Richie got here, they could pick up where they'd left off in the hospital room. That he really had meant it the way Eddie wanted him to when he'd said he loved him and that he'd not fucked it up too royally when he'd taken it as a joke.

That was Eddie's biggest fear now. That he'd fucked up. Or, that Richie really had just meant it as an 'I love you, man' sort of moment and not the 'I'm in love with you' sort of thing it had felt like. Eddie couldn't think about that right now or he'd end up packing up his bags and flying back to New York where things were familiar and he wasn't likely to die in an earthquake because Ben Hanscom didn't know that top floor suites weren't the best choice when you lived on an actual fault line.

Eddie forced himself to be still for a moment as that wave of anxiety washed over him. The shortness of breath, the pounding of his heart in his chest like he was running a fucking marathon. Eddie closed his eyes and leaned his forehead against the tile wall of the shower; found it cool even with the steam that had quickly filled up the space.

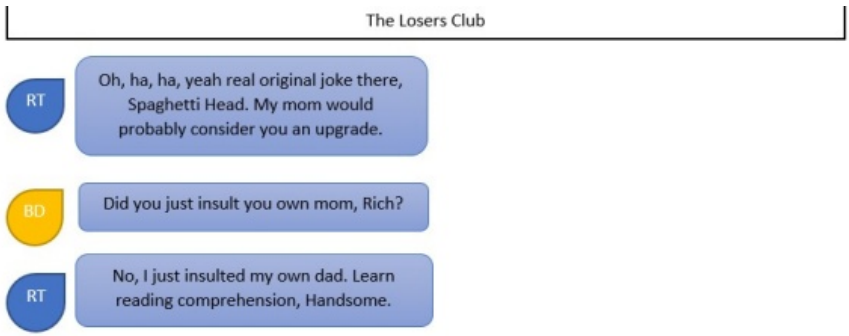
He would have once used his asthma inhaler during a moment like this. There was still a knee-jerk reaction to reach for it but he'd made certain that had stayed behind.

They're fucking gazebos!

"Placebos. I'm braver than I think…" Eddie took a couple more deep-breaths before switch off the water to the shower. He stepped out and dried off carefully before heading to get dressed. He'd have breakfast with Ben and Bev and then he'd head out to try and find his way to his new office. It'd be good to be prepared for

when he started in a few days. Know what sort of commute he'd be facing and whether it was clear where to park or not. Plan ahead.

Eddie glanced down at his phone as he pulled fresh clothes from the closet where he had carefully gotten everything in place the night before. There were a few more new messages and he hurried through pulling his shirt on before scooping it up to read what the other Losers had said.


The Losers Club
RT
Oh, ha, ha, yeah real original joke there, Spaghetti Head. My mom would probably consider you an upgrade.
BD
Did you just insult you own mom, Rich?
RT
No, I just insulted my own dad. Learn reading comprehension, Handsome.

Eddie gave a soft snort of amusement before moving to the next conversation to see that Ben had texted to ask if he was ready for them to head over so they could all go grab breakfast. Eddie sent a quick response to say that he was pretty much good to go before moving to finally pull open the curtains to look outside.

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They had ended up going out for breakfast rather than making it in as Eddie had originally thought. Ben sat across from him in the booth giving him a soft concerned look over his cup of coffee while Bev sat beside him. Eddie poured himself one more cup to nurse now that they'd wrapped up their meal. There had been a few more texts from Richie, short responses to the Losers and one checking with him on what time would work for them to hang out the day he got back. Eddie hadn't answered that one just yet.

"When are you two heading out again?"

"Probably a little after noon. We're going to swing up towards Seattle to get some things settled and dock the boat in

harbor up there. And then we'll be heading out for the long haul to Paris for the next couple of months." Ben leaned back and put his arm over Bev's shoulders as she stirred some cream into a fresh cup of coffee. Their empty plates sat between them carefully stacked now that they had finished eating.

"Ben has a project there and since I can work on new designs most anywhere, I wanted to go with him. Are you ready for the new job in a few days? Have you checked the place out online at all?" Bev gave Ben a momentary look that was full of quiet adoration as she spoke and Eddie smiled to see them happy. They deserved this happiness and the carefree sense they seemed to have around them now. Eddie wished he had found that same contentment; wondered if it was possible that he could with a bit more time.

"Yeah, I've done some digging online to figure out what sort of reputation they've got. It's the typical insurance stuff like my last place. It shouldn't really be all that different of work." Eddie gave a bit of a shrug as he tried his coffee to find that it had gotten lukewarm at best. He moved to add some more from the carafe the waitress had left them with the need to shake off the last of his fatigue from the night before.

"You ever think of trying something else?" Ben gave him a questioning look as the waitress came to pick up their plates and clear the table. They'd have to get going soon and Eddie was finding himself reluctant to part ways. It was nice having friends around again. It was nice just having friends again. He hadn't ever really realized how lonely he'd been before until there had been a reminder that he didn't have to be.

"Risk management's what I'm good at. Having to try and talk some sense into you assholes prepared me for at least one thing in life."

"Well, you did a pretty damn good job at keeping us alive in the end." Bev gave him a wink as Ben gave soft laugh and nodded his head in agreement. Eddie felt a little bit of that heat in his cheeks now, a weird sense of pride that he'd been able to crack the code on how to stop It. If he had died, at least he would have known he'd gotten the other Losers out safe.

"Yeah, well, that was a damn miracle cause none of you usually actually listen to me."

"I guess if there was ever a time for you to get through to us that was it." Ben spoke softly as the waitress brought the check and set it down on the table. Eddie reached for it, intent that he could cover it given everything that Ben and Bev were doing for him but his hand was lightly smacked away by Bev.

"We've got it this time. You just had to cover the expense of moving out here." Bev scooped up the bill and Ben handed her a card to pay for it as if they'd coordinated it together. Eddie wanted to protest, would have if it wasn't for the narrow look that Bev shot him when he opened his mouth to do so. "Just say 'Thank you', Eddie."

"Thank you." Eddie said while scratch at his temple with his middle finger which he was glad to find it made Bev laugh. "I do appreciate everything. This would have been a lot harder on my own with nowhere to go for sure."

"You would have done the same for either of us, Eds, so don't even think about it. We're happy we could help."

"And I'm glad to see that you called Richie." Bev nudged his foot with her own underneath the table and gave him a rather conspicuous wink. Eddie felt himself flush with a bit of embarrassment as he scowled lightly at her, tried to cover up any heat in his cheeks by taking a sip of his refreshed coffee only to find it was way hotter than he had expected. He felt it burn his tongue and then continue to burn as it slid down his throat.

"Fuck." He set the cup down a little too quickly and it spilled out onto his hand too. "Shit!" Ben reached across the table to help mop up the spilled coffee as Eddie cursed.

"Hey, easy there, here. This will help." Ben scooped an ice cube from his glass of water and pressed it against the back of Eddie's hand where the coffee had spilled. It hadn't actually burned that badly though the ice did soothe the slight string of heat against his knuckles. Eddie looked up at Ben with a mix of frustration and maybe just a little bit of attraction cause, okay, the guy *was* an Adonis who

still was that gentle and caring person that Ben had always been.

He caught Bev's eye for a moment and she gave him a smirk as she sat back in the booth. She had her own cup of coffee cradled in her hands as if making a point that it wasn't *that hot*.

"You know they're not supposed to serve coffee over, like, one-seventy-five. It can cause third degree burns, that's what really happened to that lady who sued McDonald's. Even if that wasn't the case there's been studies that overly hot beverages can cause esophageal cancer. You shouldn't drink anything that's over about one hundred and fifty degrees but some of these places just don't listen."

"I don't think it's gonna blister or anything. Here, you should keep this on it for a while longer though. You want a few ice cubes to put in it to help cool it down faster?" Ben finally let go of his hand but only after taking one of the napkins and dipping it into the water cup and wrapping it carefully in place.

"Yeah, thanks, I've got it. I'm fine. Thank you. What were we talking about?" Eddie knew the ice would help remove the last bit of stinging but it was also restaurant ice. He could handle a bit of a sting for a while; he'd managed to survive getting a knife to the face after all. Ben nudged the glass closer to him as if making certain he knew he could use it if he wanted.

"Richie." Bev said it bluntly and Ben gave a slightly reprimanding look that wasn't serious in the least.

"It is good that you're here. It will probably do Rich some good having someone close with everything that's been going on."

Eddie frowned at the comment from Ben. He knew that things had probably not been great for Richie with coming out while on tour but he hadn't said anything specific was up. In fact, he'd sounded good when they'd talked the night before. They hadn't really talked much lately though between Eddie moving, the general nerves of that and the fact that he had no idea where he stood with Richie at the moment, and the fact that Richie had been on tour for a while now.

“What’s up with Richie? He didn’t say anything was up last night but we didn’t exactly get a chance to talk for long.”

“He’s been dealing with a lot of shit from some of the people he’s touring with since he came out. I think he expected some of it but that doesn’t make it much easier. I’m a little surprised he hadn’t told you.” Ben shook his head, a look of protective anger on his face that said he’d be more than happy to help set some people straight. Eddie knew that setting them straight in Ben’s terms would likely mean giving them a thorough talking to. Either that or throw a rock. It’d do the trick no matter which route it ended up taking.

“That and the deadlights.” The teasing humor disappeared from Bev’s face as she said this with a sigh. Some of that carefree joy that he’d been both admiring and envious had seemed to fade away just then to be replaced with a tired, mildly defeated look. Bev was the only one that would know exactly how seeing the deadlights could affect someone.

“He hadn’t mentioned that…” Eddie pursed his lips a little bit as he looked down at his coffee for a moment before taking another sip cautiously.

“Well, there’s been a lot going on. He may not have wanted to worry you.”

“Are you two going to catch up once he’s back?” Bev smiled at the waitress as she returned with their receipt and Eddie glanced at his phone knowing he still needed to text Richie back to figure out exactly when they would be getting together. He’d have to do that once they were done which given the time would be here soon. Bev and Ben would need to get back

“Yeah, we are.”

*

Richie Trashmouth

RT

So, in case my mom's busy, what time would work for us to hang out?

Also, I know I said I'd take you out to party hard but if we can party hard at one of our places that might be better.

Meaning, I've been out around people too much and shocking as it might be, a quiet night in sounds a lot better than a night out "partying" with a dud like you.

How about you come over to Ben's place? That's where I'll be staying for a while. I'm not going to try and drive through this hell hole to whatever hovel you live in.

Dinnertime? Around 5? We can grab some take out or something.

Your mom says hi, by the way, we met up early. She's just about to head out.

RT

Does this mean I have to call you dad now? I'm not sure how I feel about that, Eds.

Please don't.

RT

5 it is. I'll be sure to bring some bourbon, dad!

3. What a Mess we are

Summary for the Chapter:

> Richie comes over to catch up with Eddie now that he's back in town after his tour. They talk but they don't. And they both realize the other is still struggling with some of their returned memories from the past.

Eddie had felt a hint of nerves when he heard Richie knock on the door. He tried to tell himself there was no reason for it; it was Richie after all. That was exactly the reason he was nervous though.

Some of that eased away for him when he pulled the door open and found Richie standing there giving him one of those know-it-all-asshole smiles. He held up the promised bottle of bourbon in one hand while carrying a bag full of food from the Chinese place down the street in the other as Eddie stepped out of the way to let him inside.

“Eduardo, I hope you’re ready to celebrate cause I’ve come to party at…mediocre levels.” Richie glanced around the place as he moved inside, giving a low whistle as he took the place in.

He looked tired but his normal self otherwise. Bad fashion and that leather jacket that had to be too warm in LA weather. He looked good as he always did, at least in Eddie’s opinion.

“You look like shit.”

“Well, fuck you too. I’m glad I didn’t spring for that extra round of crab rangoons if that’s going to be your attitude.” Eddie closed the door as Richie turned to back step towards the kitchen.

“I’m allergic to shellfish.”

“Like, actually allergic or your mom didn’t want you to eat shellfish sort of allergic because I’m pretty sure I remember you eating a ridiculous amount of honeyed shrimp at Jade of the Orient?”

Richie set the bag of food down on the kitchen counter as he gave Eddie a pointed look.

Eddie didn't remember that. Granted, Eddie had gotten pretty drunk that night and then it was immediately followed up by their fortune cookies turning into miniature monstrosities. There was a moment of silence that seemed to indicate both of their minds had gone to that panicked end to that evening.

Guess Stanley couldn't cut it.

Eddie felt that ache in his ribs again and unconsciously pressed a hand to his side as he shook his head to try and free himself of the memory.

"Well, either way, doesn't matter. I only got one order and I've already claimed them." Richie cleared his throat and started to pull the food containers out of the bag with a small frown on his face. It was clear they were both trying to move past that recollection and Eddie moved to grab down some of the plates for them to use. When he set them down besides Richie, Eddie heard him scoff in offense.

"What?" Eddie gave Richie an expectant look as he leaned a hip against the counter to look squarely at him. He had stepped closer to him than he had realized, the two of them practically touching, and Eddie had to keep himself from pulling away.

"Are you really going to waste time with plates? The entire point of the take out container is that you just eat straight from them, Eds. Live a little for once."

"Just take the fucking plate, Rich." There was a better response than that but Eddie couldn't think of it in the moment. He was mentally kicking himself; this wasn't new to him, his feelings for Richie. They'd always been there, that comfort and intimacy had always existed. The only thing that had changed was Eddie now hoped there was some intent for the two of them to act on those feelings with a bit of time.

"Come on, Eds, you're a free man now and it looks good on you. Embrace it." Eddie rolled his eyes but felt the heat rise in his

face at the likely unintentional compliment. He turned, using the act of putting one of the plates back away as an excuse to put a little more space between them and to hide his embarrassed flush. He stubbornly kept one of the plates out for himself though, gathering it up with some of the containers to carry them over to the living room.

"Come the fuck on but if you make a mess eating from your food from the container, I'm telling Ben it's your fault."

"I'm less likely to make a mess eating out of the container that the food is intended to be consumed from rather than taking the time to put it on a plate but cool…" Richie snarked back at him as he gathered the last of the containers and the bourbon to follow him. They placed the food haphazardly on the coffee table before they both sat on the couch.

"Okay, so, tell me everything. Did you have to sneak out of the house? Disappear in the middle of the night before Myra could break your ankles to keep you there? Why didn't you tell me that the divorce was final at last?" Richie snatched up the bag that contained his crab rangoons as he kicked his shoes off.

"No, it wasn't like Misery. Jesus, Rich, Myra wasn't…" Eddie winced as he trailed off. He had been about to say Myra wasn't that bad but part of him felt that was habit. Maybe Myra hadn't been one to literally break bones to keep him trapped but she had laid out a lot of guilt. *How could he leave her? What was she supposed to do? Doesn't he know that she'd die without him?* "I was already out of the house, just had to wait for the paperwork to be signed off and finalized. I never even really went home to stay, I just told her that I wanted a fucking divorce the first chance I got to speak once I was in the door. Grabbed my things and fucking left again."

He didn't need to tell Richie all of this. He knew it already; they had talked about the fact that Eddie had told Myra that first night back he wanted to leave. Eddie had maybe not told him how Myra had followed him around, berating him and begging him to stay in turns as he gathered his things. The tears that she'd cried and asked who was going to take care of her. Who was going to take care of *him?* Because, everyone knew, Eddie couldn't take care of himself.

Richie was silent for a moment as he took a bite of one of the crab rangoons and eyed him. Eddie tried to ignore it, kept his head down as he carefully scooped himself some of the fried rice before placing the orange chicken on top of it despite the fact his hands were shaking. He felt something nudge his knee, almost causing him to dump some of the chicken onto the table, and he gave Richie a scolding look. Richie nudged him with his socked foot once more and Eddie's nose wrinkled as he knocked Rich's foot off the couch.

"Again, you make a mess in this place I'm telling Ben it's going on your bill. Not mine."

"You doing okay, Eds?"

Eddie paused at the question and the soft frown on Richie's face. He took a few seconds to sit back on the couch, plate carefully in hand, as he tried to think it over. Was he okay? Was this okay? Was it just more of that old paranoia that told him something had to be wrong? Even when there was nothing he could pinpoint as being out of place he felt like there must be some shoe waiting to drop.

He looked back at Richie who was still watching him closely. That teasing nature was gone for the moment and it was simply his concern that met Eddie in that second.

"Yeah, I'm fine. It's just…been a lot. Leaving Myra, moving, all of it." Eddie nudged some of the orange chicken around on his plate for a few seconds. "It's been a lot of change after everything else…I'll be right back. I think I need an antacid or something cause I'm pretty sure that I'm getting heart burn or maybe it's a heart attack, I don't fucking know."

It felt like it was going to swallow him all of a sudden, that fear, and he set the plate back down on the table harder than he'd intended. Eddie heard Richie call after him as he got up to rush towards the bathroom, pushed his way inside and opened the medicine cabinet without a thought. He stared at the few bottles of medicine he had kept on the shelf for a moment, slammed the cabinet closed once more and gave a few curses as he leaned down to turn on the sink and splash water on his face.

Once Eddie turned the water back off and stood up to look at himself in the mirror, he found Richie's reflection behind him leaning against the frame of the bathroom door.

"Okay, let's take a look." Eddie frowned as Richie stepped up next to him, close as he leaned to grab the hand towel from the rack. He handed it to Eddie to dry his face with before opening the medicine cabinet. Eddie felt angry, more at himself than anything else, and embarrassed as he glanced over the bottles that were in there still. "Shit, Eds…"

"Look, I know, you don't have to be an ass. Most of it is unnecessary shit but I couldn't get rid of all of it. Not right away." Eddied tried to close the cabinet again but Richie held on to it to keep it open.

"Dude, I saw your fucking medicine bag when we were in Derry. I'm amazed this is all you have. Didn't you have some prescribed shit?" Richie reached to turn some of the remaining bottle to examine their labels as Eddie squinted at him; tried to tell whether he was pulling his leg or not.

"Yeah, but they were bullshit. I'm trying, okay, but I just…I can't just be fucking okay like none of this shit happened or like remove my entire reliance on everything. And I AM fucking allergic to shellfish, I think, possibly. Shit I don't know. Everything was probably just placebos just like the fucking inhaler. And that's not what this is even about, I'm the asshole in all of this."

"Yeah, no. Well, I mean, you are a bit of an asshole but not for this, Spaghetti head." Richie closed the cabinet and turned to cup his hands under Eddie's jaw lightly. He really was an asshole because at that moment, he kind of wanted to kiss Richie just then.

You're braver than you think.

"You deserve to be happy. You almost got fingerbanged to death by a giant clown spider all to save my ass. Don't listen to anything or anyone that says you're an ass for trying to do something for you."

Eddie felt Richie's thumb smooth over his cheek for a second, knew it traced along the scar left by Bowers. He swallowed roughly, tried to find that bravery to lean up towards him but before he could muster it Richie was patting him obnoxiously on the cheek.

"And you're not fucking allergic to shellfish. You ate an entire spider roll on your own and there wasn't an EpiPen in sight."

"You keep your fucking crab wontons away from me, I swear to Christ, Richie-"

"Yeah, yeah. I'm sure you do, Eduardo. Come on, let's go. That bourbon is calling my name."

Eddie sighed as Richie stepped back out of the bathroom and he found himself able to breath a little again. He also felt himself feeling a bit colder for the distance but Eddie knew better than to let that show. He wiped his face to finish drying it and then carefully hung it back in place before following Richie back out to towards the living room.

"Where's the glasses?" Richie called back over his shoulder as he continued over to the kitchen again.

"Top left." Eddie moved to the couch, took the chance to try and regain his fucking composure. He wanted to ask Richie, to bring up that conversation at the hospital and to finally see whether they had really been on the same page. At the same time, Eddie wasn't certain if he had it in him to possibly hear that he'd been wrong.

It hadn't felt like he'd been wrong back in the bathroom.

"So, you're taking some time off from doing shows?" Eddie sat down, watched Richie from the vantage of the couch as he decided to take a different approach. According to Ben and Bev, he wasn't the only one having trouble adjusting to things.

"Ah, yeah. You know, try and take some time to rework some things. We haven't really talked since then so I don't know if you've heard but-" Richie's voice dropped quiet enough that his words were drown out for a second by the sound of the ice machine

on the fridge as he filled the two glasses. Eddie knew well enough what he had said.

"Yeah, I saw the show. I told everyone you didn't write your own material." It was a joke but Eddie felt it sounded a bit flat as he said it. Richie gave a soft laugh despite that though, turned to carry the two glasses of ice over and set them on the table with the food.

"You don't get to blame that one me," Richie said as he pointed out where some of Eddie's orange chicken had fallen onto the floor when he'd set his plate down in a hurry early.

"Shit…" Eddie grabbed one of the napkins to clean it up. He knew that Ben wasn't going to go over the place with a fine-tooth comb to make sure he hadn't left any marks on anything but Eddie still didn't want to be responsible for ruining the pristine décor.

"You know, I expected people to be more upset about the fact that I admitted to not writing my own shit than the gay things, really." He could tell that Richie was still speaking carefully, a bit more cautious than was normal. "Apparently, being gay is the bigger deal for a lot of the other comedians."

"Well, fuck them then." Eddie frowned critically at the spoke on the rug where the orange chicken had landed. Dabbed it a couple more times with the napkin before sitting up straight to really look at Richie.

There was a look on his face that caught Eddie off guard. A sad little smile that was there for only a moment before Richie turned to pour some of the bourbon into both of the glasses. Eddie felt a bit like he had a few more people to swing fence posts at after seeing that smile. Richie handed him one of the glasses and then held his out for a toast.

"Fuck 'em." Richie said with a smile. Eddie nodded and clinked his glass against Rich's before they both took a drink.

*

They drank the majority of the bourbon between the two of

them. They had fallen into conversation about their lives before their return to Derry for only a short bit. Neither of them seemed to be all that keen to discuss what had been even if it hadn't all been bad. There was a general sense that, despite being successful, there were those major flaws that kept them from being truly happy.

Eddie was feeling pleasantly buzzed as they sat on the couch now, E.T. playing on the television after they'd come across it playing on one of Ben's fifty million channels. Eddie's feet were tucked in next to Richie's hip and in turn Rich had his feet resting against Eddie's right shoulder after he'd made a point of how much taller he was. The food had been picked over completely and, after a lot of arguing back and forth, Eddie had even eaten one of the damn wontons.

Apparently, he wasn't allergic to shellfish. He wasn't really convinced he liked it though.

Eddie could feel himself nodding off now and then, a companionable silence having fallen over them as they watched E.T. try and kidnap some kids into outer space on their bikes.

"So, if he could literally make them all fly at any time why did he let them go so long with the cops trying to literally run them over?" Richie spoke up as the five bikes flew across the sun and Eddie gave a snort of amusement.

"What's his name had to think it first to give him the idea. I think…look, none of it was thought through all that well. I mean, half of them aren't even peddling anymore." Eddie had to fight to stifle a yawn. He had no idea how late it was and wasn't certain it mattered since he'd not been able to sleep well lately anyway.

"They don't have to be peddling, Eds, they aren't the ones making their bikes move at this point. They're stupid if they are still peddling; you'd be one of the stupid kids still peddling because you'd be convinced it was the only way for you to stay up there."

"Oh, fuck you." Eddie gave Richie a soft shove with his feet as the kids on the screen all landed back on solid earth with the sun suddenly and conveniently set. "You think E.T. ever told them that

they'd float too?"

Richie met his gaze for a second as they stared at each other and then they both broke down into laughter. It wasn't a good kind of laughter but it was maybe a little bit of a relief nonetheless. The two of them doubled over with it and Eddie felt that pain in his chest once more as a distant ache. His permanent reminder that hadn't faded like the scars on their hands.

"Eduardo, I think…just possibly, that you've had enough for the night." Richie finally choked the words out, reaching to snag Eddie's glass away from him even though it had barely anything more than bourbon flavored water left in it. Richie downed the remaining dredges in one go, draining what was left before swinging his feet down to the floor to stand up unsteadily. "And I've definitely had enough and I think it might just be time to sleep it off. You got some spare sheets and I can take the couch?"

"Yeah, I'll grab some and leave them out for you." Eddie nodded as he stood and regretted the tangent movements as the world spun around him a bit. Maybe he'd had a little too much. His liver was going to hate him.

Once he felt steady enough, he went over to what he'd found was a linen closet the other day and sorted through to pull out some sheets. He heard the kitchen sink run for a few moments behind him as Richie rinsed off the plate and glasses. Eddie turned to look back at him once he'd grabbed the extra blankets and pillow down from the shelves.

Richie was setting the few items into the dish washer, a soft frown on his face in the moments he didn't realize Eddie was looking at him. The second he glanced up and saw him though, Eddie watched the smile spread back on his face.

"Think this will be good?" Eddie indicated the blankets in his hands as he side-stepped away from the closet and nudged it closed behind him.

"Yeah, that will be fine. Thanks, Spaghetti head." Eddie nodded, felt like there was more to say but he didn't really know the

words so he moved to set the stack down on the edge of the couch.

"Night, Richie." Eddie stepped back towards the bedroom as Richie stifled a yawn as he moved to dig through his bag.

"Night, Eds."

*

Time to float.

Eddie startled awake, disoriented in the darkness of the bedroom. He groaned as he shook off the last dredges of the dream. It was his own fault for bringing up It during the movie. He sighed as he laid back down, staring up at the ceiling for a moment before closing his eyes once more.

He heard something from out in the living room and Eddie frowned as he listened closely. The sound came again and Eddie shifted to sit back up as he realized it was Richie's voice sounding quiet but panicked. It might not have been just his own nightmare that had woken him up.

Eddie shifted out of bed when he heard the distressed noise again. He gave a curse as he managed to stub his toe against the dresser as he past. He tried to swallow it down as he pulled the bedroom door open and looked out into the living room. It was a little brighter out there without the black out curtains and Eddie was able to see the shape of the couch.

"No…" Richie sounds scared in a way that Eddie hadn't heard since those moments of startled surprise when they'd both realized he'd been stabbed.

"Richie, hey…"

Eddie moved over to the couch, saw Richie come into view sprawled on the couch giving a choked sound that broke Eddie's heart a little. *The deadlights*. Eddie leaned down to give Richie's shoulders a gentle shake to try and wake him up, wanted to get him free of whatever terror had found him in his sleep.

“Richie.” He spoke a little more forcibly this time and Richie startled out of sleep, hands coming up to grab Eddie’s shirt as he seemed uncertain whether he was going to push him away or pull him closer. “Hey, hey…it’s okay, it’s just me. You were having a bad dream, Rich.”

“Eddie?” There was thick confusion in Richie’s voice mixed with that same panic as he seemed to try and focus on him. Eddie had just enough time to think that Richie probably needed his glasses to see clearly that it was him before they were tumbling. Richie had pulled him down, shoving him back behind him but seeming to forget he was on the couch which caused them both to slid down to the floor between the couch and coffee table.

“Fuck, Richie. Jesus,” Eddie cursed as he tried to push himself back up but Richie was crowding him. He leaned to smack him lightly on the shoulder but stopped when he saw the expression on Richie’s face, realized that in their spill Rich had still pushed himself to be between Eddie and some perceived threat that he seemed confused was no longer there.

It. Except It was gone. And they weren’t in the sewers, they weren’t in Neibolt or even Derry anymore. This seemed to set in as Richie squinted out into the darkness, clearly realizing those exact things.

“Shit. Fuck. I’m sorry, Eds. Shit, there’s nothing there.” Richie ran a hand over his face as he spoke and Eddie leaned quietly to grab his glasses from where they sat on the coffee table. He had just picked them up when he heard the sob break out of Richie and Eddie nearly froze in place. It was that sad smile from earlier again, the crack in Richie’s unfazed exterior as Eddie watched his shoulders shake with another shuddering breath.

“Hey…” Eddie shifted to sit in front of him, pulled him in close feeling at a loss but knowing he wanted to chase whatever this was away. Protect Richie from it the best he could. Richie’s arms slipped around him as he buried his face against Eddie’s shoulder, gave another sob that was uncontrolled and earth shattering. “It’s okay, Rich, it’s okay…”

“Shit, I’m sorry. Give me a few drinks and I’m a fucking mess…” Richie trailed off into more sobs and Eddie just held onto him tighter.

“Hey, I was a mess even before the drinks so I think we’re fair and square,” Eddie said as he rested his cheek on top of Richie’s head. He heard him give a soft laugh that broke through the sobs for just a second. Richie started to say something in return but stopped short as he let silence fall between them.

Eddie held on to Richie until he felt the last remaining shaking sobs leave him and even then, he held on for a bit longer. He only pulled away when he felt Richie heave a quiet sigh and without looking at him so that Richie had time to wipe any remaining tears from his face, Eddie leaned to carefully snag his glasses off the table. He looked exhausted like he was already half asleep again when Eddie turned back to hand the glasses to him so he could shove them back on his face.

“Come on.” Eddie untangled them, ignored the curious look on Richie’s face as he stood and offered him his hands to help pull him up to his feet. Both of them needed sleep and Eddie knew he’d sleep better knowing that Richie wasn’t out here on his own having more of those nightmares. It also wasn’t like they weren’t used to being in each other’s space so this wouldn’t be any different. “Ben’s bed is basically an entire studio apartment on its own. We’ll just share it.”

“Are you asking me to sleep with you, Eds?” Richie tried for that teasing tone and Eddie could feel a bit of heat rise up in his cheeks at the suggestive question. He could hear a hint of uncertainty in Richie’s voice though, could still hear those fragile pieces of emotion beneath the surface that told him that he still wasn’t alright despite the tears having ended.

“You know, I’m too fucking tired to even argue with you right now. Count yourself lucky I’m not regulating you to the floor.” Eddie huffed a little as they stepped into the bedroom and he heard Richie’s soft laugh. It made him smile a little to hear it, less of that sadness leeching its way into Richie’s voice as they both moved to opposite sides of the bed to climb under the covers.

Eddie got settled into place, aware and listening to Richie doing the same on the other side of the bed. Heard the click of him setting his glasses down on the nightstand once more and then felt his weight rest on the mattress close enough Eddie could feel the hint of his warmth. Not quite touching, the two of them back to back in the darkness.

Eddie closed his eyes, shifted just a bit to get more comfortable. If it happened to make it so his back pressed against Richie's, it was a coincidence. Just like it was a coincidence that Eddie got the best night's sleep he'd had in a long time with Richie lying close besides him.

4. Not Ready to Mingle

Summary for the Chapter:

> Eddie almost talks with Richie but not quite. Still, after their first rocky night of catching up the two of them start to fall into a routine together as they sort their individual lives out.

Morning had come slow for the first time in a long time. Eddie stirred, felt warm as he curled around his pillow. Or at least he had assumed it was his pillow at first until he slowly realized that pillows didn't typically snore quietly, warm breath brushing against his shoulder. He cracked his eyes open, tried not to move too much so that he didn't stir Richie awake, and looked at him.

Richie was curled up tightly next to him, face buried against his shoulder with his hair tickling Eddie's chin. They were entwined around each other, legs tangled as they curled in as if trying to be as close as possible. He felt a flush that was a mix of embarrassment and a quiet rush of happiness. He carefully tilted his head, nuzzled softly into Richie's hair for a selfish moment. He'd have to wake them up, have to hope Richie wasn't thrown off by how close they'd gotten over the course of the night.

Eddie sighed, took in the slight hint of some sort of spice that seemed to cling to Richie's hair, and closed his eyes for a few moments. He felt some of that pleasant contentment fade, felt it darken into a hint of dread as he went over the night before in his mind once more. Eddie didn't know how to broach the conversation in regards to what had been said in the hospital. Wasn't certain if this could be a segue into it. If he was wrong, if he'd read it wrong and if Richie truly did have someone…Eddie tightened his hold on Richie a little.

"I know I'm like a big teddy bear but you squeeze any harder and its going to be more than stuffing that pops out. Especially after all that alcohol last night." Richie's mumbled and sleep filled voice interrupted Eddie's thoughts as he felt a flush of embarrassment. Despite the words, he felt Richie's arms tightly a

little around him in return and they seemed to linger there for a second before Rich finally pulled away. “You seen my glasses, mystery stranger? Cause I can’t see shit without them and I’m pretty sure I fell asleep with them on last night.”

“Why the hell didn’t you take them off?” Eddie frowned as he froze in place, scared of rolling over onto Richie’s glasses and managing to damage them somehow. Richie didn’t seem to take as much care as he started patting around at the blankets and pillows in search of them.

“What can I say, I just wanted to make sure I could see your cute face, Eddie Spaghetti,” Richie reached over and lightly smacked at Eddie’s face as if he thought his glasses might be there somehow. Eddie smacked his hand away and finally rolled over to turn on the light with a curse.

“It was pitch black, asshole, you wouldn’t have been able to see my face either way.” Eddie still could feel a bit of heat in his cheeks as he looked back, shifting the blankets to try and help Richie find his glasses. There was a soft clatter as something finally fell free from the sheets and down onto the floor. Richie squinted with focus down at the floor to see if he could find them and Eddie just rolled his eyes as he shifted out of the bed. “Honestly, how do you function?”

“Very carefully. And truth be told, dumb luck. I’ve broken and lost more glasses than you can count.”

Eddie bent and picked the glasses up from where they’d fallen and gave them a critical look before cleaning them on his shirt. Richie was trying to untangle himself from the bed sheets now that he’d gotten himself wrapped up in them during the search. He got free just as Eddie finished getting the smear marks off his glasses and he dropped his feet to the floor and held his hands out expectantly. Eddie eyed him, not willing to just hand the glasses over to get smudged all over again, and he instead stepped closer so he could slide them in place on Richie’s face.

It settled over Eddie what he’d done as Richie blinked back at him. He lightly patted Richie on the cheek before turning to head

towards the kitchen without another word. Felt that nervous swarm of butterflies in his gut once more as he heard Richie scramble to get up and follow him. He wanted to work up the nerve, the guts to start the conversation that was the entire reason he had chosen to move out to California in the first place. Wanted to find out once and for all if this was really something that could be; something more than just wishful thinking and misunderstanding rolled into one.

As Eddie stepped into the kitchen, focus on the coffee pot and how to phrase the question that was on his tongue, Richie spoke up instead.

"So, when are we going to go out? Cause I can definitely show you the best…well, the better places to go around here. Hell, I can even wingman for you." Richie spoke the words between a yawn and Eddie frowned at him from over his shoulder as he got the coffee pot set up. He had assumed Ben would have had one of those fancy ones that could make fifty different drinks depending on the tiny cups you put inside them. Instead, it was an old-fashioned coffee pot that still used paper filters and loose coffee grounds.

"What?"

"I'd make a great wing man for you, Eds. Straight girls love gay guys…at least that's what I've always heard. I'm sort of knew to the whole thing but that's all beside the point anyway. We have twenty-seven years of hanging out to make up for now that you're here. There's this place down by the pier that I think you're going to love if you can get over the fact that it's an open-air restaurant. I'm sure that breaks some sort of 'health code' to you but it had *the* best burgers."

Eddie stood, pouring water into the reservoir as Richie rambled behind him in that casual way of his. Fast paced with a hint of humor in his voice. He couldn't focus past that initial statement; couldn't get quite past the fact that he knew for certain now that Richie definitely thought he was straight.

"I'm not really looking to hook up with women, Richie." Eddie said it with a frowned without really thinking it through. He set the coffee pot into place and stabbed at the brew button before

turning to look back at Rich who had gone quiet.

"You should get back out there, Eds."

"I'm not…I don't. So, what, am I supposed to be your wing man now?" Eddie stumbled through the words sounding more confrontational than he really had intended. Richie look a bit confused as he shook his head, pulling back a bit like he needed some distance. "Or have you already met someone?"

"Me? No…just not. Looking. You know. It's hard right now with everything and I'm still sort of trying to figure some things out in my head now that I'm Out. And, even if I wasn't, I know the media is going to be going crazy with this and starting something right now just wouldn't really work, you know? Like, not if that person doesn't want to get swamped. And how do you tell if someone really wants to be with you and not just with the fact that they can get their name in the news? Besides, with your puppy dog eyes I'd be lucky if I got a pity flirt?"

"Well, how about we just go out together? Like you said, we've got twenty-seven years to make up for." Eddie swallowed roughly as he spoke wished he had left it with that first sentence and seen what Richie would have taken from it. Still watched him carefully to see how he'd end up interpreting it. Richie gave him a long look, the silence stretching between them for a few beats before a small smile gave to Richie's face.

"Yeah, of course, Eds." Eddie gave a short nod of his head, turning back to pull down two coffee cups from the cabinet without another word. "So, you got a job out here or…?"

"Yeah. I start in a couple more days." Eddie sighed as he worked on pouring them both some of the coffee. "Is there something you want for breakfast?"

"Nah, I'm not really a morning eater most the time. I'm good with just some coffee." Richie took the cup from him when Eddie offered it. "You do more of that risk management then? Gonna tell other people how to live boringly?"

“Not healthy to skip breakfast. Have some fucking toast or bacon or something at least.” Eddie gave Richie a disapproving scowl as he moved to the fridge to figure out what he could make. No wonder Richie looked like shit so often if he didn’t even both to eat in the mornings. “And, yes, I mean, no, asshole. I assess risks for insurance companies. Look, it might not be as glamorous as your gig but it’s what I’m good at doing. It pays the bills and it utilizes my business degree.”

“Wow, you really sold me on what an interesting job it is. Tell me more how much you love it.” Richie spoke into his coffee with a bland tone of voice, finishing off the comment with a long loud sip and raised eyebrows. Eddie raised a single finger salute in his direction, tried to think of some sort of come back but failing as his mind circled around the direction of their conversation. He pulled the fridge open and dragged the loaf of bread out, distractedly pulling out a couple of slices to drop them into the toaster.

“I don’t have to love it, Rich, I’ve just got to do something to make ends meet. Myra basically took all the savings we had in the divorce. Even if she hadn’t, I would have had to return to work eventually.” Eddie huffed softly as he waited for the toaster to pop back up. He grabbed the butter from the fridge next, working on an old habit he hadn’t even realized he’d remembered.

“Well, I mean, if you have a business degree you could do something different with that?” Richie’s tone was a little softer, less teasing and more serious this time as he made the suggestion. Tried to be helpful. Eddie leaned a hip against the counter as he turned to look back at him. “Fresh start, Eds. You could go all the way with it. Nothing’s stopping you.”

“That’s a nice ideal, Rich, but…I told Ben and Bev the same thing. I don’t even know what I’d do.” The toaster popped and Eddie startled a little at the sound of it. He caught Richie’s smirk of amusement before he turned, grabbing the slices and replacing them with two more to get started. He buttered the two, still-warm slices of toast and then pulled down a small jar of cinnamon sugar that he used to dust the top.

Something they had made as kids. A treat on a budget.

Eddie leaned back to hand Richie the plate as the toaster popped a second time. This time he managed to not get startled by the sound of it as he set about getting the two slices prepared for him.

"Shit, cinnamon toast. I haven't thought about this in forever."

"Well, you wouldn't have, dipshit. We forgot most everything from out childhood until recently." Eddie took the time to put the butter, bread and cinnamon jar away before turning back to Richie once more with the intent of sharing their toast together. Richie was taking a large bite of his toast with a happy look of nostalgia on his face that made Eddie feel secretly pleased with himself.

"Okay, so, now that we've established that neither of us necessarily want to mingle. I'll show you around town, show you the good places to go and some of the bad places too. You're going to hate it here, Eds."

Eddie bit into his own toast as Richie talked and felt like he could never hate a place if Richie was there. Well…he could maybe hate a place a little but Richie would make him hate it just that small bit less.

*

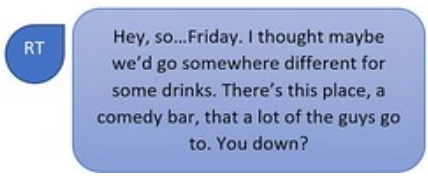
Showing him around turned into Richie asking him most nights if he wanted to go for drinks or dinner. Even once work started, they inevitably ended up at some out of the way dive or parked on his couch eating take out. Eddie got the sense that these might not have been Richie's regular places. Some of them had seemed almost like last minute finds but he didn't want to push and ask why.

The truth was that Eddie had sort of figured out why Richie was showing him around to spots that weren't necessarily his regular haunts. He knew he was avoiding people, including his agent who Richie had ignored phone calls from on more than one occasion in his presence, as well as the other comedians he had toured with.

A few nights had passed since they'd last hung out, gone to a small little Korean barbecue place that had ended up being fantastic. Eddie had been able to tell something was weighing on Richie then and hadn't heard much from him since. It was enough of a shift that it had Eddie worried but he knew that Richie had been trying to sort out how best to make the changes he wanted made.

He was sitting at work trying to finish up a report despite the fact that he was finding it all felt like such a slog already. It had only been a few weeks since he'd started but they had thrown him into it quickly given his experience. He thought it would be alright at first, that he'd settle in but that wasn't really the case.

The problem was that Eddie still didn't know what else he might want to do with himself if he didn't stick with this but the longer that he sat there in that office day by day, the more certain he was that he wanted to do something different. He blinked as his phone chimed beside him and he leaned back in his chair as he picked it up to read the text message that had come through.


RT
Hey, so...Friday. I thought maybe we'd go somewhere different for some drinks. There's this place, a comedy bar, that a lot of the guys go to. You down?

Eddie stared at the message with a small frown on his face for a few moments. He got the sense this was more than just a casual decision to take him to a comedy bar. Wondered if this was less Richie's idea and more his agents. Or if Richie was trying to make some steps back into his own career based on his terms. Eddie pursed his lips as he typed out a response and quickly got a reply back.

Yeah, of course. Should I meet you at your place or mine to head over there?
RT
Yours should be closer. Pick you up around 7, Spaghetti head.

Richie's response, short and to the point without any sort of teasing or prodding made Eddie worry a little bit more. He sent a

quick affirmative back that seven would work and set his phone down with a sigh. He hoped that it would go better than Richie seemed to feel it was going to from his previous comments.

"Kaspbrak, how's that report coming?" Eddie sat up a bit straighter as he heard his boss's voice. The man himself appeared a few moments later, leaning to look at the report that Eddie was trying to compile.

"Should be done soon, sir."

"Good. Just because you're new doesn't mean I want you slacking. When you're done there's a project out by the pier, I'll need you to start work on next week. They're trying to insure a new business out there and I want it to be air tight before we even think of doing so. Especially with this global warming bullshit. Give our guys everything they can to work with to make sure we aren't going to get screwed over on this."

It wasn't anything new but Eddie had to admit, it bothered him more now. Bothered new life Eddie who wasn't doing things simply because they were expected of him. His job was to anticipate every potential problem; judge just how much the poor schmuck getting insured was going to have to pay in. How much they could get out of them and how little could they justify paying out if something *did* happen.

It was the same as before but Eddie absolutely found his skin crawling every time one of his coworkers talked about it so blatantly.

"Of course, Mr. Huckle. I'll start pulling up the information on that one as soon as I'm done with this report." Eddie gave a nod, tried to will his boss away so that he could focus. He heard his phone buzz again and it drew Huckle's attention as it lit up the screen with another message from Richie. Eddie did his best to ignore it as his boss hovered, eyes narrowed at the phone for a moment.

"You know, Kaspbrak, if you need more work…"

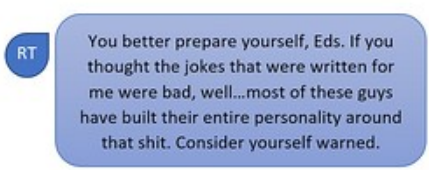
"No sir, I apologize for the interruption. Still dealing with

some things from the move and unfortunately not all of them respect the time frame I stated I was available. I'll get that report to you as soon as possible." Eddie picked up his phone and opened his drawer to drop it in there to make the point. Huckle eyed him for a moment before giving him a wide smile that felt more like a baring of his teeth.

"Not a problem at all, Kaspbrak. I'm looking forward to seeing what you've done with that report. Remember, being new doesn't excuse slacking off."

"No sir, of course not." Eddie waited, held his breath for a few long moments as Huckle finally walked away. He eyed the drawer where he'd put his phone, was tempted to pull it out to see what Richie had said this time but knew better. Huckle had already proven to be observant and had made it clear that he felt there should be no interruption during the work day. Eddie would have maybe admired that once when he'd had it as an excuse not to answer Myra's every whim.

Now, it rather loathed the fact that even a two second break to tell Richie he'd see him later was seen as being a waste of time. He sat staring at the report on his screen for a few second longer before pulling the drawer open just enough that he could wake his phone without pulling it out. The screen lit up to show him the text from Richie.


RT
You better prepare yourself, Eds. If you thought the jokes that were written for me were bad, well...most of these guys have built their entire personality around that shit. Consider yourself warned.

Notes for the Chapter:

This is a little more of a filler chapter as these two start kind of falling back into their highly altered lives. The next chapter will be a bit meatier!

Thank you for reading and, as always, comments are

appreciated :) <3